



Brattleboro Physicians Reach Out To Patients During H1N1 Outbreak

Mark National Influenza Vaccination Week (Jan. 10-16)
with the H1N1 Flu Shot or Nasal Spray

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Media Contact: Communication Office
Vermont Department of Health
802-863-7281

BRATTLEBORO - Pediatrician Valerie Rooney, MD, sat down with her office supervisor (Laurie Dix), made a list, and checked it twice. Who are the patients with severe underlying conditions at risk for serious complications from the new H1N1 influenza virus?

When vaccine was first available for the H1N1 strain, supplies were so limited that many pediatric practices received only one 10-dose vial. Within minutes of getting their first doses, Dr. Rooney and her team had 10 names, and they picked up their phones and started to call.

The message to each patient's parent: We have a limited supply of the vaccine and you need to get your child protected. Can you get in here right away?

Despite the best efforts of Vermont physicians statewide, 43 children have been hospitalized in Vermont with H1N1-related illness. Because of the rapid response of many of the primary care practices in southern Vermont, however, not a single pediatric patient was hospitalized or put on a ventilator at Brattleboro Memorial Hospital.

Robert Tortolani, MD, president of the Vermont Medical Society and a family physician at Brattleboro Memorial Hospital, was also preparing for the impact of the limited H1N1 vaccine supply. Tortolani knew many patients in southern Vermont would not have a (primary) physician and would lean heavily on the resources of the hospital.

"We prepared for a scenario where a very large number of patients would be coming to the Brattleboro Memorial Hospital emergency department, with a large number of hospitalizations," Dr. Tortolani said. "Fortunately, I saw only four patients in my practice with flu-like illness and no one had to be hospitalized. Most people with flu-like illness called us and we were able to treat them over the phone."

Throughout National Influenza Vaccination Week (January 10-16), the Health Department is promoting vaccination for everyone over 6 months and recognizing those individuals who supported and strengthened the state's mass vaccination campaign. Dr. Rooney and Dr. Tortolani knew their patients and their communities well, and prepared as early as possible with other area physicians and health care providers to protect as many people as possible.

"We called the very highest risk patients the day we got that first dose of injectables," Dr. Rooney said, "We told them, 'You come today or tomorrow because this disease can jeopardize your child's life.' Most of the credit goes to my partners, the nurses and medical assistants who work with us - they worked tirelessly when they got vaccine to get it out to people."

Brattleboro Memorial Hospital was ready for a wave of patients, including preparing an alternate emergency room site at the hospital for patients presenting with flu-like illness.

"The emergency department director and the chief medical officer asked physicians at the hospital to agree to volunteer their time if the situation escalated and many did volunteer," Dr. Tortolani said. "Fortunately the emergency plan did not have to be used."

"We were prepped," Dr. Tortolani said, "and I think most hospitals in Vermont were ready as well. Thank goodness the flu dwindled. We've been lucky so far."

H1N1 vaccine is widely available at many sites around the state, including health care provider offices, hospitals, pharmacies, and public clinics.

To locate a public clinic, go to the Health Department's website at www.healthvermont.gov, then select "**Get Vaccinated**" at the top of the home page, or dial 2-1-1. Guidelines for deciding about medical care are available at the Health Department's website: healthvermont.gov or dial 2-1-1, and at the federal website flu.gov.

You can also follow us on Twitter at twitter.com/healthvermont.

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Vermont Department of Health | 108 Cherry Street | Burlington, VT 05402
Voice: 802-863-7200 | In Vermont 800-464-4343 | Fax: 802-865-7754 | TTY/TDD: Dial 711 first
Health Care Provider Infectious Disease Reporting: 802-863-7240 or 800-640-4374
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